Jury: King assassination a conspiracy

By NILES LATHEM

A Memphis jury attempted to rewrite history last night — ruling that the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was the victim of a vast murder conspiracy, not a single gunmen.

In a bombshell verdict that sent shock waves from Tennessee to Washington, a jury of six whites and six blacks ruled in favor of the slain civil-rights leader's family in a wrongful-death lawsuit against Lloyd Jowers, a retired Memphis businessman.

James Earl Ray, the ex-con who was convicted in King's murder, had joined forces with his family in pursuing the case. He died last year before he could testify.

The jury appeared to accept the theory of King's lawyers — that Jowers and Ray were part of a vast conspiracy involving Mafia bosses in New Orleans and shadowy U.S. government agents.

Six years ago, Jowers — who owned Jim's Grill across the street from the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, where King was killed on April 4, 1968 — told ABC that he paid someone other than Ray $100,000 to kill King. He said he was doing it as a favor to a local Mafia figure.

The jury only awarded the King family $100. But the verdict gave his widow, Corretta Scott King, and sons what they most wanted — official acknowledgment that there is evidence of a conspiracy.

"I'm just so happy to see that the people have spoken," King's son Dexter said. "This is what we've always asked for."

Juror David Morphy told reporters: "We all thought it was kind of a cut-and-dried case."

NY Post 12/9/99